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Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Illinois Human Services Commission Public Hearing
September 21, 2011

– Testimony –

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) is a coalition of over 130 ethnic community based organizations across the state of Illinois who educate and organize immigrant and refugee communities to assert their rights; promote citizenship and civic participation; monitor, analyze, and advocate on immigrant-related issues; and, inform the general public about the contributions of immigrants and refugees.

As you know, the State of Illinois is home to 1.8 million immigrants, the sixth largest immigrant population of any state in the nation. While diverse in origin, language, education, and skills they share a deep desire to build a better life for their families and a better community in which to live. According to the 2010 Census, Illinois' population is now 13.5% foreign-born. **Immigrants accounted for half of the state's total growth in the past decade, with the Latino Population increasing 32.5% and the Asian Population increasing 38.6%.**

Over the past ten years, ICIRR has worked in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to serve the immigrant community through programs funded from the **Immigrant Integration Services Line** under the Human Capital Development Division of the Department of Human Services. Critical programs such as the **Immigrant Family Resource Program** which provides equal access to food assistance, health care and income support for immigrant families that are unable to

In addition, the **We Want to Learn English** program has increased English as a Second Language (ESL) learning in Illinois by linking native born volunteers with immigrants as tutors – tutoring in English, Civic Education and after school programs – enhancing education and fostering community integration. The We Want to Learn English program has grown to a State/Federal/Local partnership, working with the Federal AmeriCorps program to provide a 76% match to the 24% state funds invested. Through these programs, ICIRR has served 728,230 families through 72 organizations in 52 languages across the State. ICIRR has directly assisted 50,840 green card holders become citizens and has worked with over 13,809 Illinoisans who volunteered over 124,470 hours.

ICIRR administers sophisticated programs across the state that operate at multiple levels; maintaining grass-tops ethnic media campaigns, partnerships with businesses, community colleges and faith based institutions, while still reaching into local immigrant communities through grassroots outreach. Through all this, our programs remain strictly compliant with state and federal programmatic and funding regulations.

ICIRR recognizes the Committee's "Budgeting for Results" method of allocating funds, however this method of allocation was still based on a funding base that was initially distorted and did not match the needs and populations in the state. In total, the Immigrant Integration Services were funded at \$8.09 Million for FY 2011 – which is **1/100th of the state budget**. Over the past three years the **Immigrant Integration Services line has been cut by over 22%** while the immigrant population has increased exponentially.

If funding continues to decrease, immigrant service providers across the state will not be able to maintain our programs and will certainly not be able to help impact the issues facing the growing immigrant community with fewer resources. In addition, with these continued budget cuts, **the infrastructure of immigrant serving CBOs that has taken decades to build up will continue collapsing across the state and no longer exist**. We have the data

to show that the immigrant services line in Illinois is being used effectively and efficiently to create change amongst immigrant families and communities and we would like to thank the Illinois Human Services Commission for continuing to support our very needed and critical work.